PHD IN TRANSITION DESIGN
School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University

DESIGN THEORY & PRACTICE Year 1, Fall
“Design Theory & Practice” advances understanding of how different methods inform different kinds of research and practice. Through a total of 15 sessions spanning 15 weeks, you will explore the intersections of theory, practice and praxis, to develop a holistic understanding of design research as both a theoretical and practical process. Coursework includes the design of praxis methods to shape your own inquiry, ad deepen your research practice.

TEACHING DESIGN Year 1, Fall
“Teaching Design” focuses on planning, conducting, reviewing, and revising learning experiences in academic and professional contexts. Meeting weekly, we will study learning theories and instructional design approaches. You will apply your discoveries to design learning objectives, outcomes, instructional activities, performance measures, formative assessments, and summative evaluations, to create innovative and effective teaching and learning experiences.

ECOLOGICAL WORLDVIEW Year 1, Fall
An “ecologist” mindset is the starting point for Transition Design: Indeed, to be ecologist is to understand the principles through which natural systems flourish and to apply these principles to society, so that we too may flourish without compromising or destroying the natural systems on which we depend. Spanning 15 weeks, this seminar class focuses on key themes of ecologist to help us navigate our social, ecological, and existential crises.

TRANSITION DESIGN Year 1, Spring
“Transition Design” drives design-led change towards socially and ecologically sustainable, convivial and equitable place-based lifestyles. Spanning 15 weeks, with two classes each week, this course explores multi-level wicked problems to establish mutually beneficial relationships between people, the natural environment and the designed world; repositioning designers as agents of sustainable change.

EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES Year 1, Spring
“Experiential Futures” equips you with the tools and methods to envision and model system-level change, over time. Spanning 7-weeks, you will explore future-focused design practices, coupled with training in futuring and foresight techniques and methods. Coursework includes the development of a “Time Machine”—an immersive, future scenario for storytelling and research activation developed in collaboration with others.

FRAME PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE Year 2 & 3
“Framing Proposals for Change” introduces techniques to support you in framing research projects geared toward steering sustainable change in the world. Spanning 7-weeks, this course helps you frame research contexts, define research questions, plan methodological approaches, and speculate upon outcomes and their impacts. Coursework is the development of a PhD Proposal, a paving the way for the rest of your PhD.

RESEARCH I, II, III, IV Year 2 & 3
“Research I, II, III, IV” provide a 2-year period of deep, reflective and self-directed research. Across this sequence of courses spanning 4 semesters— you work closely with your Advisory Committee to build upon your Research Proposal and Literature Review. During this phase you will deepen your literature review; undertake field research, develop practices and begin pulling together your research into a coherent body of work.

DESIGN WRITING WORKSHOP Year 3, Fall
“Design Writing Workshop” deepens your connection with the craft of design writing via a cross-section of academic, journalistic and creative styles. Spanning 15 weeks, this practical hands-on course helps you develop your style, structure and confidence in design writing. Writing is a creative process where ideas are explored, discovered and expressed. Coursework includes developing a full PhD dissertation outline.

CODA I Year 4
“CODA” provides the critical space for divergent research themes to coalesce into a clear and conclusive body of research. You will assemble your dissertation ready for examination in May of the final semester. Dissertations can be entirely written (50–80k words), or a body of written and practical work (40–50k words, by negotiation). Final work must an original contribution to knowledge, advancing the field of Transition Design.

CODA II
Defence Coaching (March) Final Defense (April) Walk (May)

Topics
Research Of Design; Research For Design; Research By Design; and, Design Praxis

Topics
Investigating Learning Theories; Teaching and Learning Contexts; Defining/Addressing Learning Gaps; Knowledge and Skill Acquisition; Motivation, Attention, and Memory; and, Iterating Instructional Design

Topics
Place and Bioregions; Goethan Science; Living Systems and Gaia; Relationality and Context; Radical Nomism; and, Everyday Life and Infrastructure

Topics
World Modelling; Foresight & Foresight; Emerging Design Practices; Design Pedagogy, and, Sustainable Futures

Topics
Life Modeling; Developing & Prototyping; Design for Change; Design Tools; and, Transition Designing

Research Papers, Research Practices, Research Pilots & Prototypes, Dissertations, Literature Reviews, and Literature Reviews

Topics
Conference Papers & Journal Articles; Design Criticism; Podcasts & Digital Publishing; Transformational Design Curricula; and, Developing a Literature Review

Distilling Research Findings; Finding Voice; Making your Point; Coupling Divergent Themes; Dissertations Production; Editing & Refining; and, Defense Prep